

Esteemed State Secretary of Health John Wiesman and Director of the Health Care Authority, Dorothy Teeter,

We thank you for your leadership in convening a groundbreaking process.

As you hold this letter in your hand, wherever you are, we ask that you take a minute to honor the indigenous, upon whose land you stand. All too often, we forget to do so. In the spirit of a Community Health Worker, we intend to carry the charge of bringing often forgotten communities to the forefront.

This was our golden opportunity to show you who we are, what we do, how we do it and the passion we bring to our work as Community Health Workers. Healthier Washington is a transformative initiative, and its success is contingent upon aligning with those who live within the system's gaps. The Community Health Worker (CHW) Statewide Task Force is setting a positive and collaborative tone by ensuring community voice.

Unfortunately, much too often, processes like these are used by systems and organizations to "check a box". **As a body, we commit to making ourselves available for continued change with Healthier Washington.** This merits a face-to-face meaningful dialogue about next steps, with not just a few, but a diverse community of CHWs. This dialogue would serve to create authentic inclusion and alignment between State entities and the state's Community Health Workers. We are invested. We are interested in strategizing with you to ensure CHW voice remains an integral partner in upcoming processes across Washington State. **At the end of this letter, you will have the points of contact with whom to communicate for continued CHW alignment in the early months of 2016.**

It is indicative of the State's progress in leadership that 40% of this Task Force was composed of CHWs. When CHWs are represented, our communities are with us. We are the eyes and ears on the ground that understand the roots of disparities, provide cultural knowledge, and have a uniquely earned trust. No amount of training can replace shared lived experience.

In 2014, the American Public Health Association passed a policy statement that "urges state governments and other entities considering creating policies regarding CHW training standards and credentialing to engage in collaborative CHW-led efforts with local CHWs and/or CHW professional groups. If CHWs and other entities partner in pursuing policy development on these topics, a working group composed of at least 50% self-identified CHWs should be established (*Support for Community Health Worker Leadership in Determining Workforce Standards for Training and Credentialing*. APHA Policy Number 201414; November 18, 2014)." Thus, as the Task Force's recommendations are considered and acted upon, we urge DOH and HCA to continue to engage and

include CHWs in the decision-making process. Doing so will position the state to meet the goals of Healthier Washington.

In consideration of Healthier Washington's goals, CHWs can help the state determine how to pay for services, ensure healthcare focuses on the whole person, and mobilize communities to improve health for all populations by focusing on social determinants and health equity. **The Accountable Communities of Health and governing bodies will not meet their goals without Community Health Workers operating at the core of their model.** CHWs live at the frontlines of inequities, and therefore are critical agents for finding solutions to improve population health outcomes. We bridge gaps in prevention and integration which contribute to unnecessary health and social service costs. Ultimately, a strong CHW workforce in Washington State will strengthen our communities and care delivery systems.

Present in our state are existing and growing networks of CHWs representing a rich array of roles, communities, and cultural backgrounds. As Community Health Workers, we are accountable to our communities. As such, we ask that in the interest of transparency and alignment, CHW voices are embraced as vital in all efforts of Healthier Washington.

As CHWs, we dream of better integration of our roles within the health care system. There are many doubts about how this integration can take place; integration without compromising the unique values, and that which CHWs bring, the *heart of service*. Without better integration and acknowledgement, we run the risk that CHWs are seen as marginal, second class workers, in turn giving a lesser quality of attention to underserved communities. It is a true honor to arrive at this reflection in gratitude, because this is surely the beginning of changes that will make history in the public health of our state. It is to grant those who have creatively worked for decades with their own resources to bring an opportune voice of encouragement and mutual support to those who truly need it, a place in the continuum of care.

Finally, we are optimistic about the future of the CHW workforce, and see it as the catalyst for the improved health of our state. We collectively look forward to continued partnership and communication in every step of the way.

In the spirit of gratitude and partnership,

Signed, the CHWs,

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